PAUL GRIST & STEVE YEOWELL

TORCHWOOD

THE OFFICIAL COMIC

TITAN
#2 OCT 2010 $3.99
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THIS ISSUE'S STORIES:

'FATED TO PRETEND'

Story Brian Minchin
Art Steve Yeowell
Flashback Art & Lettering
John Workman
Colors Phil Elliott

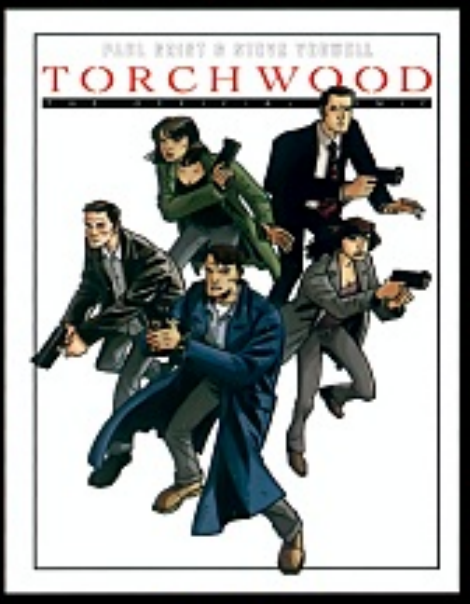
'BROKEN' PART 2 OF 5

Story & Art Paul Grist
Lettering John Workman

PREVIOUSLY IN 'BROKEN': Jack, Gwen and Ianto visit the Clockhouse Hotel where a string of disappearances (of families and even hotel rooms!) have occurred. Gwen and Ianto are split up and become trapped, while Jack bumps into Bilis Manger, who says he has been trapped in the hotel by Rift energy and needs help to escape...

'THE MAN WHO DREAMED OF STARS'

Short story by Brian Minchin
Art by Ben Willsher



COVER A
Art by Paul Grist

COVER B

EDITOR MARTIN EDEN
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR CHRIS TEATHER **PUBLISHERS** NICK LANDAU & VIVIAN CHEUNG

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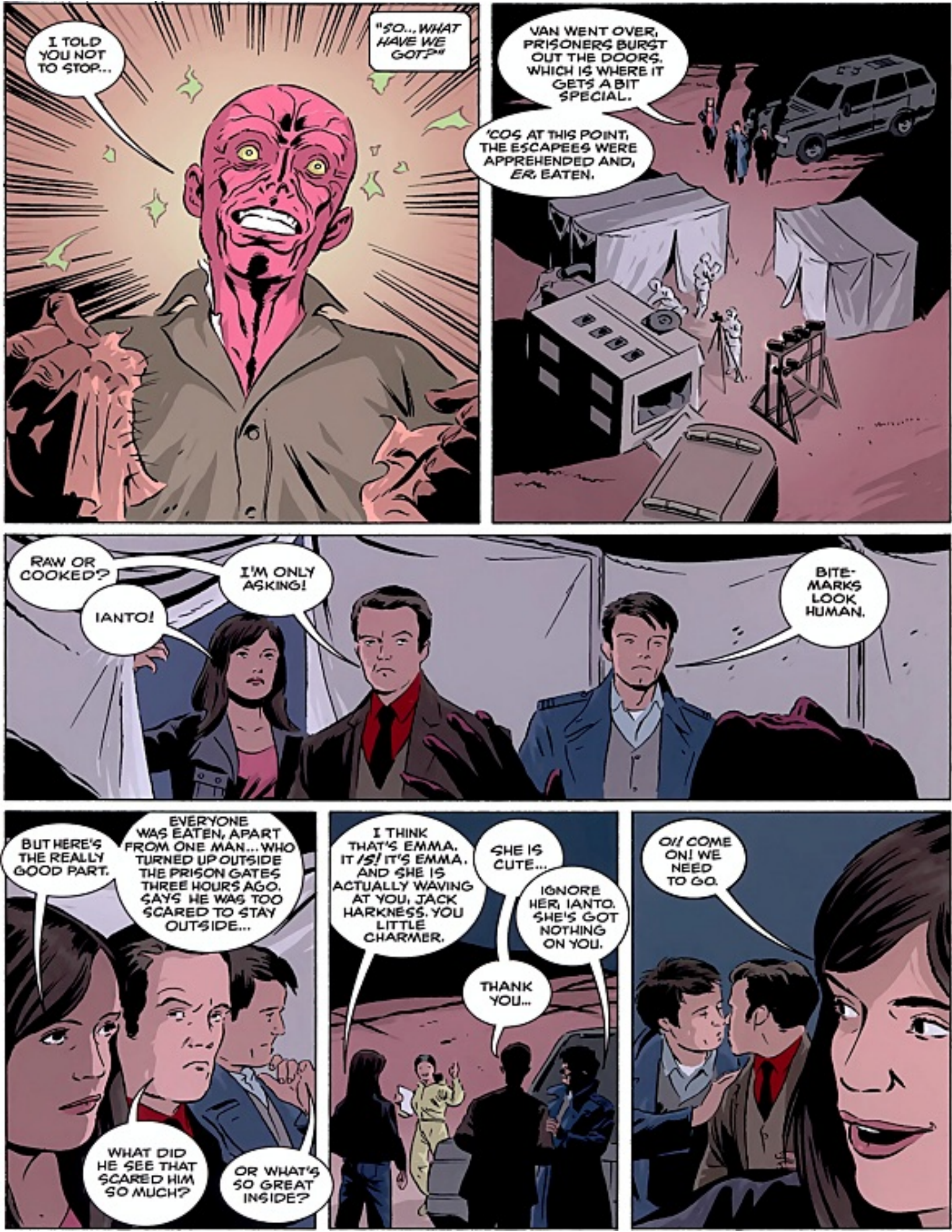
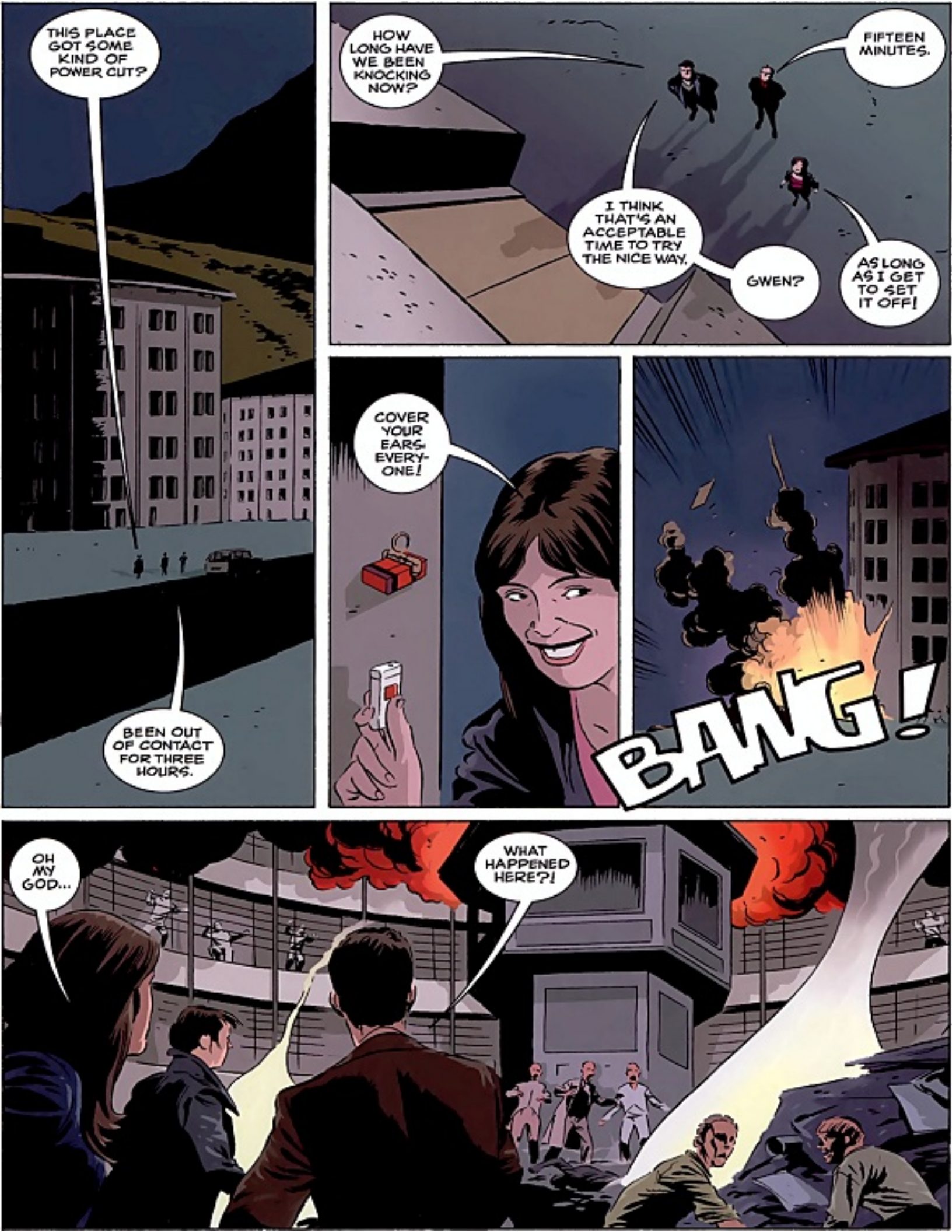
FATED TO PRETEND
SCREECH
WRITTEN BY BRIAN MINCHIN
ART BY STEVE YEOWELL
LETTERING & FLASHBACK SEQUENCES BY JOHN WORKMAN
COLORS BY PHIL ELLIOTT
I NEED BACK-UP! THEY'RE GOING CRAZY BACK THERE!
HOLD STEADY, UNIT TEN MINUTES AWAY...
I NEED SUPPORT! NOW!
DON'T STOP...
...KEEP DRIVING! I NEED TO GET INSIDE THE PRISON!
RIGHT... I'VE STOPPED DRIVING NOW.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON BACK THERE ...I'M GONNA HAVE A LOOK...
OH MY GOD!


I TOLD YOU NOT TO STOP...
"SO... WHAT HAVE WE GOT?"
VAN WENT OVER, PRISONERS BURST OUT THE DOORS, WHICH IS WHERE IT GETS A BIT SPECIAL.
'COS AT THIS POINT, THE ESCAPEES WERE APPREHENDED AND, ER, EATEN.
RAW OR COOKED?
I'M ONLY ASKING!
IANTO!
BITE-MARKS LOOK HUMAN.
BUT HERE'S THE REALLY GOOD PART.
EVERYONE WAS EATEN, APART FROM ONE MAN... WHO TURNED UP OUTSIDE THE PRISON GATES THREE HOURS AGO. SAYS HE WAS TOO SCARED TO STAY OUTSIDE...
WHAT DID HE SEE THAT SCARED HIM SO MUCH?
OR WHAT'S SO GREAT INSIDE?
I THINK THAT'S EMMA. IT *IS*! IT'S EMMA. AND SHE IS ACTUALLY WAVING AT YOU, JACK HARKNESS. YOU LITTLE CHARMER.
SHE IS CUTE...
IGNORE HER, IANTO. SHE'S GOT NOTHING ON YOU.
THANK YOU...
O// COME ON! WE NEED TO GO.


THIS PLACE GOT SOME KIND OF POWER CUT?
BEEN OUT OF CONTACT FOR THREE HOURS.
HOW LONG HAVE WE BEEN KNOCKING NOW?
FIFTEEN MINUTES.
I THINK THAT'S AN ACCEPTABLE TIME TO TRY THE NICE WAY.
GWEN?
AS LONG AS I GET TO SET IT OFF!
COVER YOUR EARS, EVERY-ONE!
BANG!
OH MY GOD...
WHAT HAPPENED HERE?!

"OVER THERE..."
"THIS WOULD EXPLAIN WHY NO ONE ANSWERED OUR CALLS..."
WOULD THEY BE ZOMBIE$, JACK?
FLESH-EATING ZOMBIES?
OOH, WOULD YOURS GROW BACK?
IS THIS REALLY THE TIME?!
JACK, ARE THESE ZOMBIES FRENCH?
I THOUGHT THEY SMELT PARTICULARLY BAD.
CHECK THE ARMPITS!
GWEN!
THEY'VE TAKEN HER DOWN THERE!

WOAH, THERE! YOU'RE NOT MAKING A MEAL OF ME!
JE M'APPELLE ALEC...
...WILL YOU HELP US?
WHAT ???
THIS WAS ALL A MISTAKE. STOP THE RIOT, AND I WILL BRING MY PEOPLE BACK DOWN HERE... LOOK!
HEY, GWEN...
BAG OF BONES GIVING YOU TROUBLE?
NICE OF YOU TO TURN UP, JACK!
HEY, HE'S KINDA CUTE, HE'D LOOK GREAT IN SKINNY JEANS...
BONSOIR, MONSIEUR HARKNESS.
I THOUGHT IT WAS YOU! MOULIN ROUGE, 1890.
I AM STANDING HERE...
NO NEED TO BOAST, NOT WHEN THIS POOR GUY'S GOT NO BLOOD FLOW--
JACK, SHUT UP... COME OVER HERE...

NICE BED. LIKE THE STRAPS...
SUCH A LET-DOWN WHEN THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE THEIR FACEBOOK PICTURES, ISN'T IT?
JACK...
HE WAS A NEWCOMER, DRAWN TO OUR HOME TO JOIN HIS KIND. IT WAS ALL A MISTAKE. HE PANICKED WHEN THE POLICE VEHICLE CRASHED.
OKAY. THE CURE FOR PANIC IS NOT TO *EAT* EVERYONE. WHAT IS THIS PLACE-- HOUSE OF LOONY ZOMBIES?
THE GUARDS TRIED TO STOP HIM. I HAVE PUNISHED HIM FOR HIS MISTAKE...
SO YOU KILLED THE KILLER... WELL...KILLED HIM A LITTLE BIT MORE.
ZOMBIECIDE? *ER*, I'VE GOT NOTHING.
YOU'RE PICKING THE BONES NOW.
STOP IT, YOU TWO.
IF WE EAT LIVING FLESH, WE GET STRONGER.
BUT I DO NOT ALLOW IT HERE. WE HAVE ANOTHER WAY...
OOH, EATING WITH NO STOMACH. MESSY.

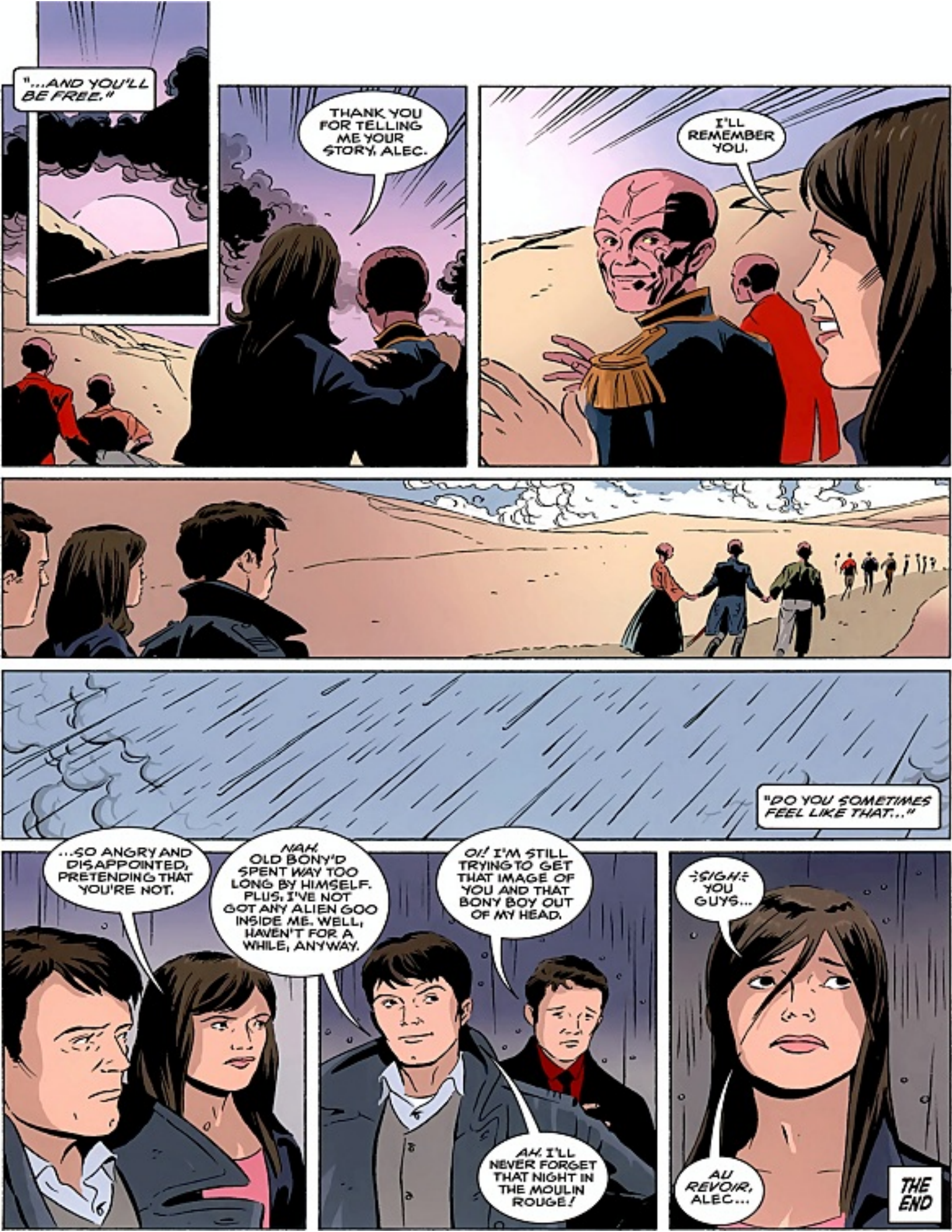
NOW, THAT IS A SURPRISE. THEIR VERY OWN RIFT.
IT IS WHAT DREW US ALL HERE. IT KEEPS US ALIVE.
IF YOU LET US STAY HERE, I SWEAR WE SHALL NEVER HARM THE PRISON ABOVE.
ALL THOSE DEAD BODIES UPSTAIRS. WHY DIDN'T YOU STOP HIM EARLIER?
THEIR LIVES ARE SO SHORT.
WHAT DOES IT REALLY MATTER?
THEY COME AND GO. WE HAVE BEEN HERE FOR YEARS.
WILL YOU LET US LIVE HERE? OR SHOULD I LET MY PEOPLE FEED?
THE RIFT CAN'T MAKE PEOPLE LIVE FOREVER.
SOMETHING DID THIS TO THEM.
WHAT'S THIS IN THEIR BONES?
ALL DRAINED INTO A LITTLE POT. VERY NEAT. I THINK WE'LL GET ON...

IT'S AN OLD CONJURING TRICK. IT KEEPS THE BODY INTACT. BUT AT A COST-- TERRIBLE BREATH, AND MAJOR PSYCHOSIS.
IT'S BANNED IN EVERY MAJOR STAR-SYSTEM. BUT THAT'S NOT THE INTERESTING BIT. WHAT DID THIS TO YOU?
WE WERE CHOSEN! WE WERE SAVED, AND WE HAVE TRAVELLED HERE TO WAIT FOR THE GLORIOUS REVOLUTION.
HIDING IN A BIG, DAMP PIT?
THE PROCESS TURNS THEIR SKIN INTO RICE PAPER. YOUR JOINTS WILL ONLY JUST HOLD UP FOR, WHAT, FIVE MINUTES' WALKING A DAY.
ONE GOOD RAIN, AND YOU'LL BE LITTLE PUDDLES OF BONES.
I WILL NOT BE YOUR PRISONER!
TAKE THEM!
LIKE THE ATTITUDE. YOU GO, BONY...
PROBLEM IS, YOU'RE HALF-ALIEN, AND YOU'VE PISSED A LOT OF PEOPLE OFF.
LOOK INTO MY EYES...YEAH, THAT'S SOME LIFE-FORCE YOU CAN SEE?
HARM ME AND MY FRIENDS, AND I WILL BE BACK TO BURY THIS PLACE AND EVERYONE IN IT.
YOU ARE WORSE THAN US! A FREAK! LEAVE US HERE!
CAN'T DO THAT! SIXTEEN MEN ARE DEAD. I'M SORRY.

I WANT TO TALK TO THEM.
I WANT TO KNOW HOW THEY GOT HERE...
OKAY, BUT ONLY 'COS I'M NOSTALGIC FOR THAT NIGHT IN THE MOULIN ROUGE. ME AND TOULOUSE LAUTREC HAD A FIGHT OVER HIM. CAN YOU STILL PUT YOUR LEGS BEHIND Y--
JACK!
ALEC, I KNOW YOU WEREN'T ALWAYS LIKE THIS.
TELL ME. ABOUT YOU.
OUI...
"...I HAD BEEN SHOT.
"HE SAID HE COULD CURE ME, IF I WOULD RETURN HIS HELP."
THE NEXT DAY, THE WOUND WAS GONE, AND I WAS BETTER. I LIVED FOR 10 YEARS, 20, 40. WHEN MY WIFE DIED, I WAS A MAN OF 71, AND LOOKED AS YOUNG AS YOU DO NOW.
I BEGAN TO WONDER IF I WOULD EVER SICKEN.
"FOR A WHILE, I STAYED NEAR MY FAMILY, WENT TO THEIR PARTIES WHEN IT WAS DARK AND DRUNKEN.
"I MADE MYSELF A LEGEND! THE MAN WHO CAME OUT OF NOWHERE."

I BURNT THE EYES OF THE MAN THAT BEAT MY DAUGHTER.
"I CUT THE CHEATING FACE OF MY GREAT-GRANDSON'S SECOND WIFE.
"I FOUND THE THIEVES THAT CHEATED MY NIECE AND HANGED THEM FROM THE MARKETPLACE DOOR.
HOPITAL
"BUT NOTHING EVER CHANGED. THE SAME STUPID THINGS, YEAR AFTER YEAR.
"THEY BORED ME.
"THEY SICKENED ME.
"I LOOKED AT THEIR SMALL, UGLY LIVES, AND I FELT SUCH ANGER. THEY WERE SATED WITH AFFAIRS AND JEALOUSIES AND ARGUMENTS OVER A FEW MILES OF STONY SOIL.
"IT WAS ALL SO TINY, SO UNIMPORTANT. THERE ARE FAR GREATER THINGS."
I COULDN'T PRETEND ANY MORE. ALL OF THEM TALKING AND TALKING AND WASTING THEIR LIVES.
THEY MEANT NOTHING TO ME.
IT'S OKAY.

"I FOLLOWED THE SIGNS HE LEFT US. I WAS THE FIRST TO ARRIVE, BUT SOON THERE WERE HUNDREDS.
"SOME LEFT THEIR LIVES STRAIGHT AWAY, OTHERS LASTED CENTURIES BEFORE THEY GREW TIRED. BUT WE ALL WEARIED IN THE END. HERE WE WAIT FOR OUR SAVIOR."
HE'S NOT COMING BACK.
HE WAS KNOWN AS MONSIEUR JECHIEL. I MET HIM ONCE IN FRANCE.
HE WASN'T A GOD, NOT EVEN A PRIEST-- HE WAS A CONMAN, WORKING ON COMMISSION. RECRUITING A LOYAL ARMY OF THE UNDEAD TO FIGHT FOR THE TOGOMIL HERESY.
I TOLD HIM TO GET LOST, BUT HE WAS ALREADY LEAVING. HE'D NOT BEEN PAID, HE DIDN'T SEE IT THROUGH. HE LEFT.
I DON'T BELIEVE YOU. THERE ARE SO MANY OF US... HE WOULD NOT LEAVE US ALL?
I'M SORRY, SOLDIER. BUT OUT THERE IS THE REAL LIFE.
HIDING IN HERE, TOO SCARED TO MOVE --THIS IS PRETENDING.
AND IT'S TIME TO STOP.
I CAN RETURN YOU TO THE HERETICAL MOONS. THEY LOVE THEIR LONG-LIVING WORKERS.
OR?
ONE BURST OF RAIN...


"...AND YOU'LL BE FREE."
THANK YOU FOR TELLING ME YOUR STORY, ALEC.
I'LL REMEMBER YOU.
"DO YOU SOMETIMES FEEL LIKE THAT..."
...SO ANGRY AND DISAPPOINTED, PRETENDING THAT YOU'RE NOT.
NAH. OLD BONY'D SPENT WAY TOO LONG BY HIMSELF. PLUS, I'VE NOT GOT ANY ALIEN GOO INSIDE ME. WELL, HAVEN'T FOR A WHILE, ANYWAY.
O! I'M STILL TRYING TO GET THAT IMAGE OF YOU AND THAT BONY BOY OUT OF MY HEAD.
AH. I'LL NEVER FORGET THAT NIGHT IN THE MOULIN ROUGE!
:SIGH: YOU GUYS...
AU REVOIR, ALEC...
THE END

FOR A MOMENT, ALL THERE IS, IS THE FALLING.
JACK?
AND THEN YOU STOP, AND EVERYTHING LOOKS THE SAME.
JUST LIKE IT WAS BEFORE YOU FELL.
BUT IT'S NOT THE SAME. NOT THE SAME AT ALL.
HELLO?

NOOOOOO!
WH--?!?

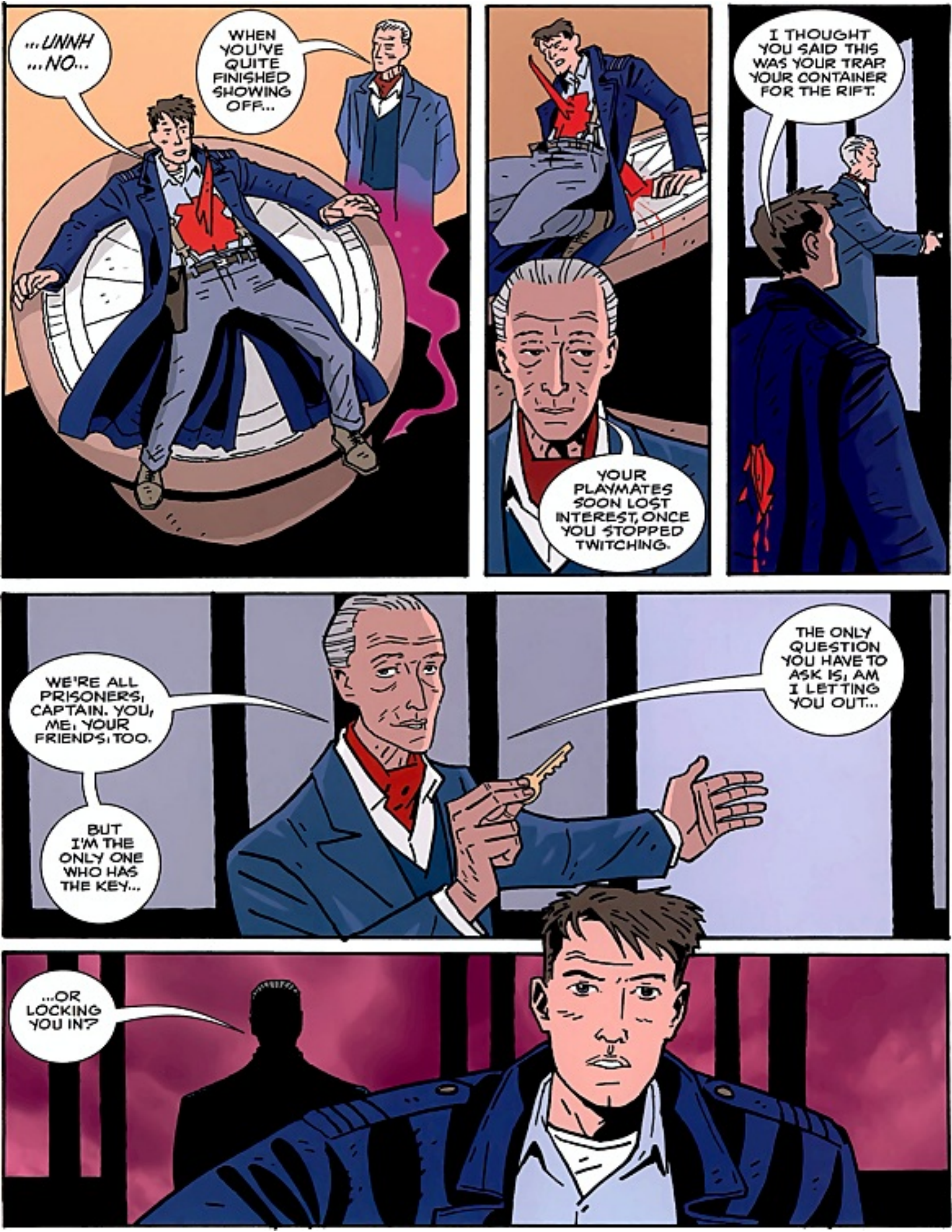
OH!
HELLO--

AND THINGS MAY NEVER SEEM THE SAME AGAIN.
I'VE KEPT IT CONTAINED FOR AS LONG AS I COULD -- BUT SOONER OR LATER, IT WAS ALWAYS GOING TO GET OUT.
IT WAS JUST A MATTER OF TIME.
GREAT-- NOW I'M BEING ATTACKED BY SHADOWS?
I COULD DO WITH A LITTLE HELP HERE, BILIS!
SORRY, JACK. I REALLY AM A BIT USELESS WITH THE PHYSICAL SIDE OF THINGS.
THAT'S WHY I NEED YOU.
BILIS-- WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? WHAT'S HAPPENING?
I REALLY COULDN'T SAY.
THE CLOCKHOUSE HOTEL
IT COULD BE THE BEGINNING OF EVERYTHING.
COULD BE THE END OF EVERYTHING.
EITHER WAY, I WOULDN'T WANT YOU TO MISS IT.
BROKEN
WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL GRIST
COLORING BY PHIL ELLIOTT
LETTERING BY JOHN WORKMAN
PART 2 OF 5

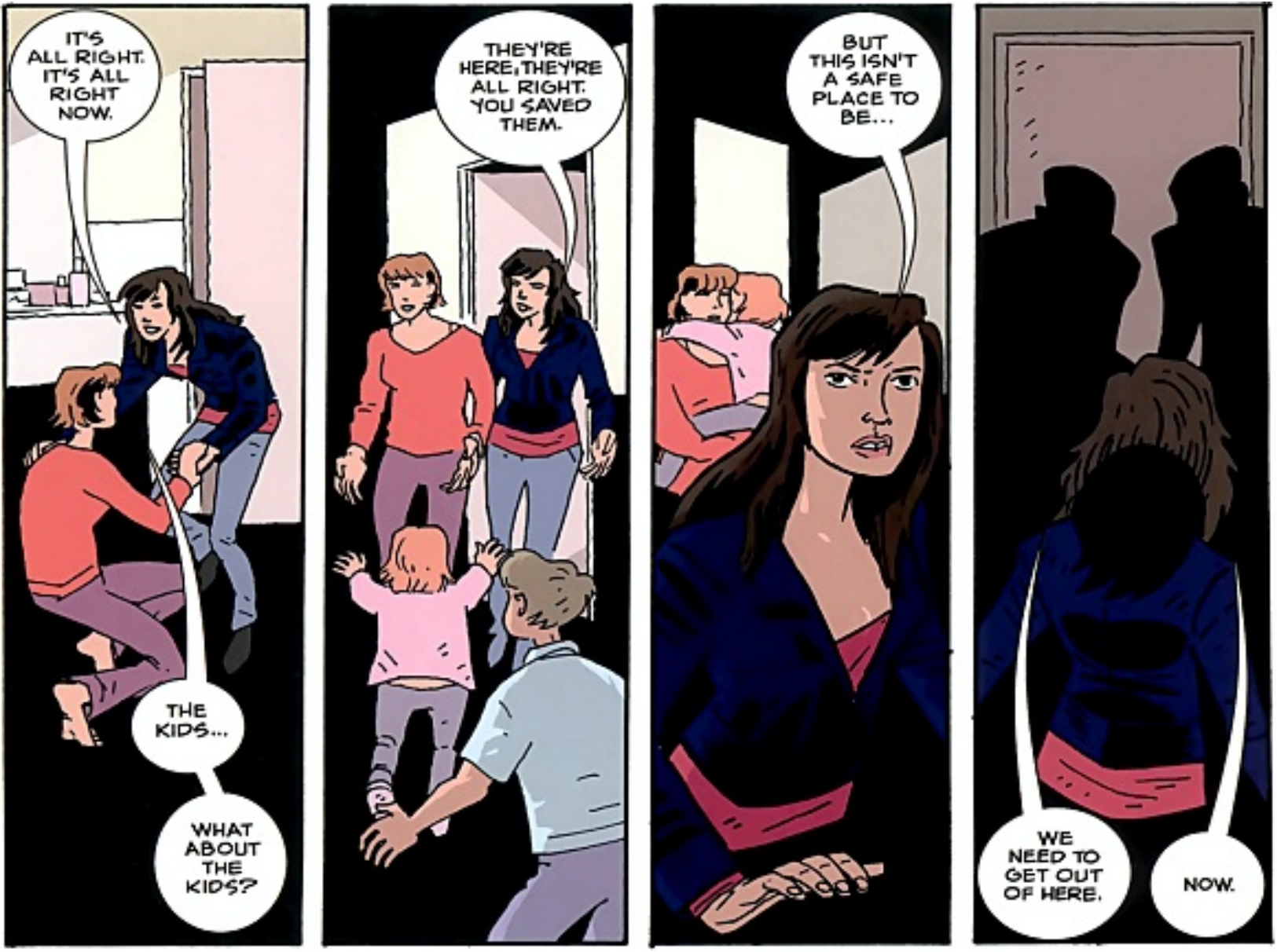
I'M NOT REALLY HERE--
THWACK!
BUT THAT'S THE THING ABOUT FALLING.
ON THE PLUS SIDE, THEY CAN'T HURT ME--
CLOCK
HOT
FALLING IS EASY.
YEARRGH!
--BUT AS FOR YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS ...?
WELL, I REALLY CAN'T MAKE ANY PROMISES.
IT'S HITTING THE GROUND THAT HURTS.

CRASH!
NOOO!
IT'S OKAY, IT'S OKAY, I'M HERE TO HELP
NO! YOU'RE ONE OF THEM... ONE OF THE SHADOW THINGS.
IT'S JUST A SMART SUIT. LOOK.
I'M NOT A SHADOW. I'M HERE TO HELP YOU.
I SAW YOU IN THE ROOM WITH THEM.
I SAW THEM--I THOUGHT YOU WERE ONE OF THEM--
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M SEEING ANYMORE--
CLUNK!

I'M IANTO JONES--
ME AND MY FRIENDS, WE'RE GOING TO GET YOU OUT OF HERE.
YOLANDE. YOLANDE SCOTT.
PLEASED TO MEET YOU, YOLANDE SCOTT.
WHAT ABOUT MY HUSBAND DARREN? HAVE YOU SEEN HIM?
WE NEED TO CONCENTRATE ON GETTING OUT NOW--
2
THERE'S SOMETHING COMING UP IN THE LIFT--
TING
IT'S ALL RIGHT--
WHAT?
IT'S ALL RIGHT, YOLANDE. I KNOW HIM.
THIS IS MY FRIEND, CAPTAIN JACK--
NO! NO! NO!
--HARKNESS--

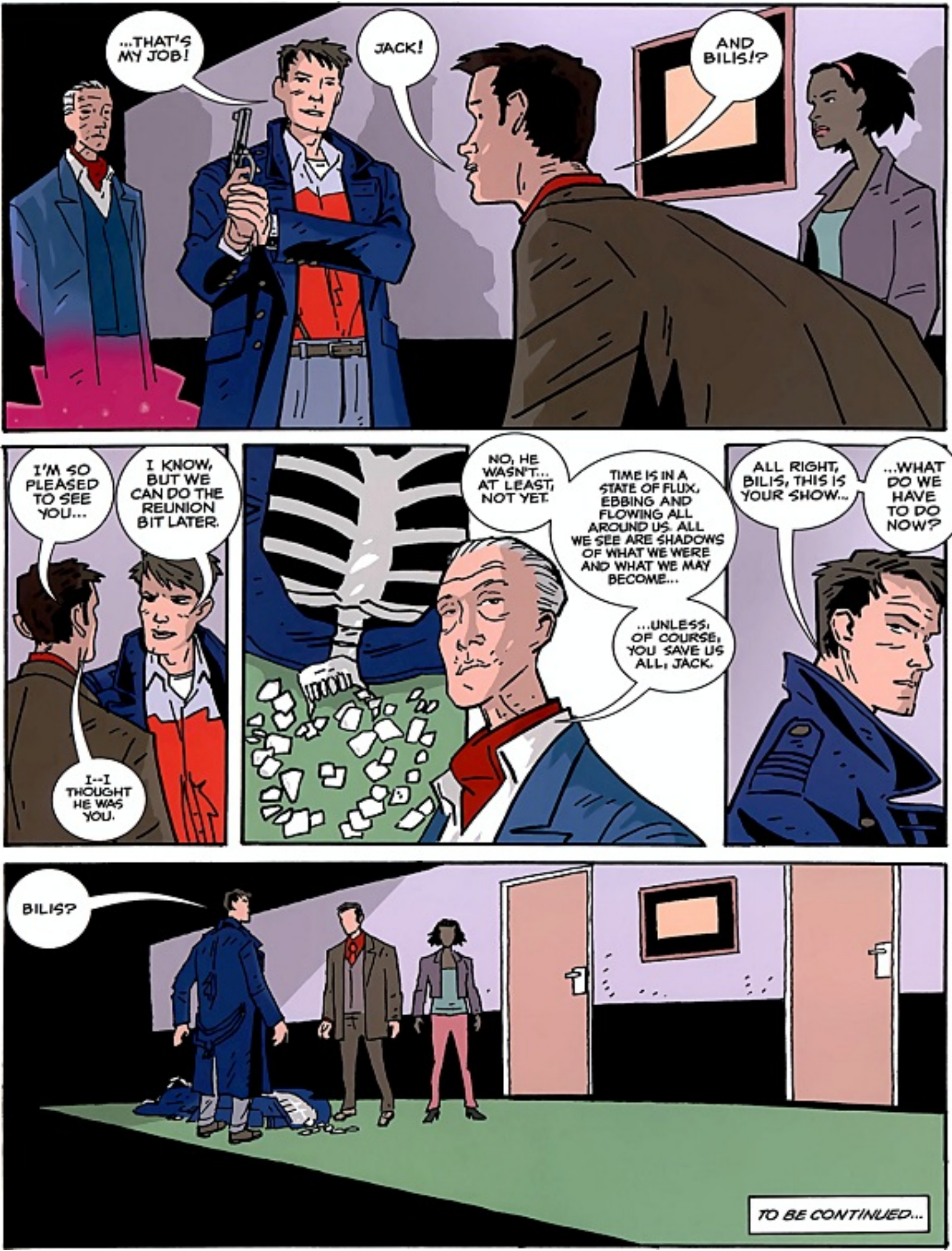

...UNNH ...NO...
WHEN YOU'VE QUITE FINISHED SHOWING OFF...
YOUR PLAYMATES SOON LOST INTEREST, ONCE YOU STOPPED TWITCHING.
I THOUGHT YOU SAID THIS WAS YOUR TRAP. YOUR CONTAINER FOR THE RIFT.
WE'RE ALL PRISONERS, CAPTAIN. YOU, ME, YOUR FRIENDS, TOO.
BUT I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO HAS THE KEY...
THE ONLY QUESTION YOU HAVE TO ASK IS, AM I LETTING YOU OUT...
...OR LOCKING YOU IN?

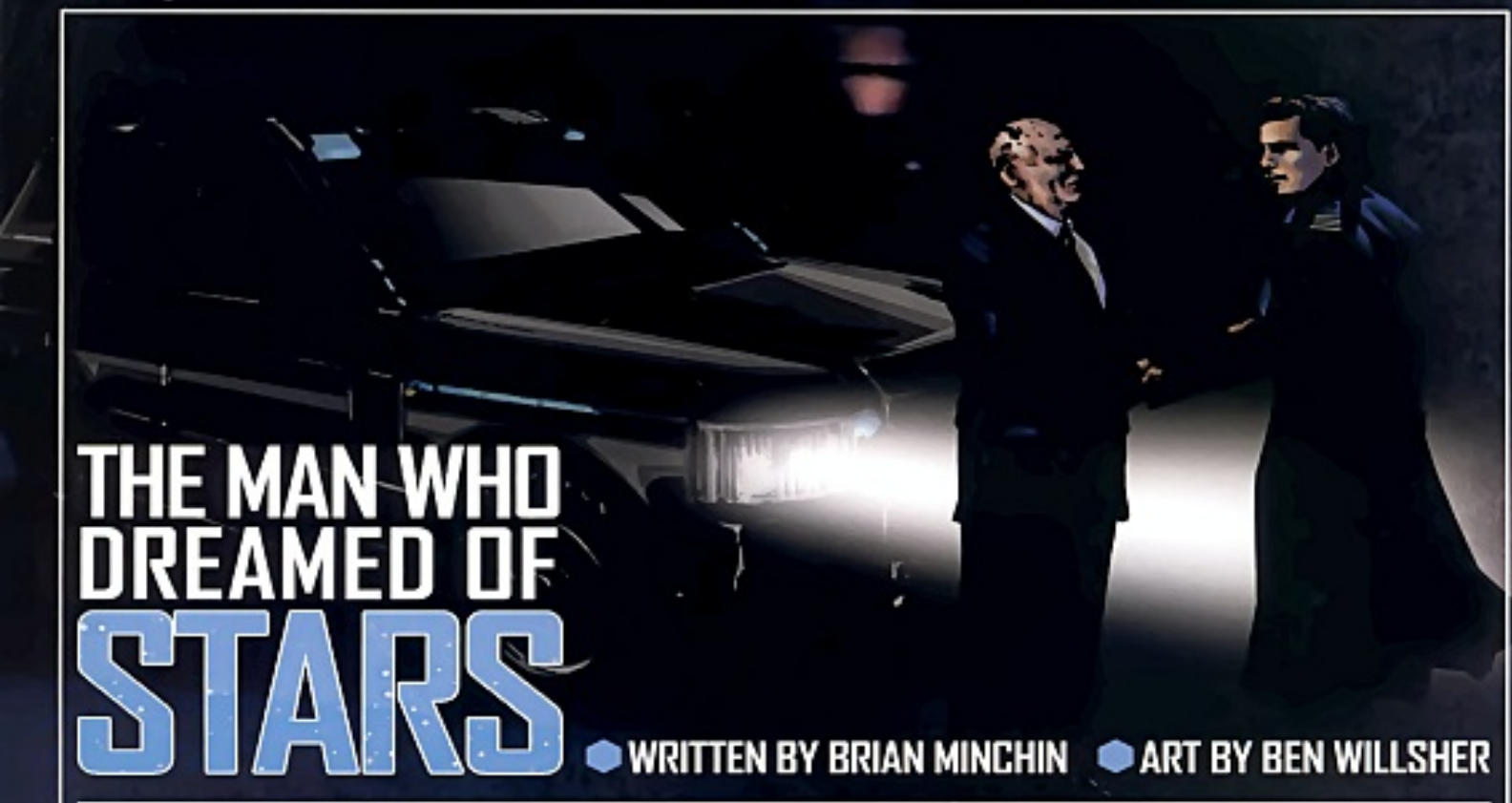
HELLO. MY NAME'S GWEN.
WHAT'S YOURS THEN, SWEET-HEARTS?
SAM.
CARON.
WHERE'S YOUR MUM? IS SHE HERE?
SHE TOLD US TO STAY HERE. THERE WAS A MAN AT THE DOOR...
WE'RE PLAYING A GAME...
HE SAID ROOM SERVICE...
YOU JUST STAY THERE ...I'LL FIND YOUR MUM...
HE...HE JUST...
HE CAME AT ME...


IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S ALL RIGHT NOW.
THE KIDS...
WHAT ABOUT THE KIDS?
THEY'RE HERE, THEY'RE ALL RIGHT. YOU SAVED THEM.
BUT THIS ISN'T A SAFE PLACE TO BE...
WE NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE.
NOW.

ACK!
ACK!

N--N--
CRACK!
NO!
YOU'RE NOT JACK!
NOT...
FIRE
CRACK!
CRACK!
you're not jack...
FIRE
BLAM!
HEY, KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THE STAFF...


...THAT'S MY JOB!
JACK!
AND BILIS!?
I'M SO PLEASED TO SEE YOU...
I KNOW, BUT WE CAN DO THE REUNION BIT LATER.
I--I THOUGHT HE WAS YOU.
NO, HE WASN'T... AT LEAST, NOT YET.
TIME IS IN A STATE OF FLUX, EBBING AND FLOWING ALL AROUND US. ALL WE SEE ARE SHADOWS OF WHAT WE WERE AND WHAT WE MAY BECOME...
...UNLESS, OF COURSE, YOU SAVE US ALL, JACK.
ALL RIGHT, BILIS, THIS IS YOUR SHOW...
...WHAT DO WE HAVE TO DO NOW?
BILIS?
TO BE CONTINUED...



THE MAN WHO DREAMED OF STARS

WRITTEN BY BRIAN MINCHIN ART BY BEN WILLSHER

Jack had last seen Bill Wainwright in the dying days of World War II. Back then, Bill had been a young doctor specialising in burns victims, and Jack had burst into his ward and his life one frantic September night. His Austin truck had screeched to a halt in the middle of the quad, and Jack had leapt out carrying two airmen that he'd pulled barely breathing from a crashed and flaming fuselage. Over 42 hours, Jack and Bill worked hand in hand, the flurry of anti-aircraft fire still ringing in Jack's ears. He wasn't sure if it was coffee, barbiturates or mania that kept Bill going as hour passed hour and their lives hung precariously in the air. There was no precedent for what Bill was doing; the team were improvising, experimenting, and to Jack it felt like magic. After almost two days in theater, Bill had declared the procedure a success, and collapsed into Jack's arms. They never spoke of the laser scalpel Jack had brought to the operating table, or the quantum-anesthetics Jack had used to keep the airmen alive. Bill had merely shaken Jack's hand, put the unmarked pillbox to one side for later use, and thanked Jack for his help, confident that he'd never see him again. Now, an old man and long retired, Bill had called for the favor to be returned. Jack found himself standing once more by the isolation ward of Queen Victoria Hospital listening to the passionate voice of the 84-year-old surgeon. "They thought calling me in was a last resort, but I took one look and knew this was something for you. And before you ask, this doesn't mean I like you. If there was anyone else that could have helped, I'd have called them. You, however, are a bit different." With a professional's eye, Bill reached out and traced the contours of Jack's face, marveling at how untouched he was by the indignities of time. "And quite impossible, as you well know."

Jack gently took Bill's hand away from his face. "What made them call you back? Did the club need a new barman?" Bill shook his head. "Hardly any of the boys left now, Jack. Still, we managed to marry most of them off in the end." The Guinea Pig Club of injured servicemen had met every Thursday for 60-odd years, all of them long-term patients of Bill's and happy to meet where they wouldn't draw attention.

But Bill's thoughts were elsewhere. "I was hoping you could bring some of that space quackery of yours to bear on this new patient. We've had to re-open Ward 11. We didn't even do that for the Falklands." Jack was intrigued that after all these years, something had the power to make Bill uneasy. There was something about burns victims that made people turn away: the way the redness of the flesh drew in the eye, the sinews shining through the tattered skin. But if Bill wanted to hide someone away, then they must be a special case indeed. "He was found outside Worthing, by Totnes Weir. They think he crawled into the water himself, trying to lessen the pain." Bill paused before opening the solid green door. "He's in an isolation containment unit, for all the good it's doing him." Jack knew exactly what Bill meant and grimaced. "What do you think I can do?"

Bill didn't answer straight away. "His dog tags were burnt into his chest," he said eventually. "His name's Silas. I told the chaps here his date of birth was illegible. But I saw it, and he's more like you than me." Bill paused. "It's a hope, I suppose. Maybe he'll talk to you. Maybe he's got something we can use." Jack put a hand firmly on Bill's shoulder. "You know I'll need to see him alone." He was touched that Bill's burning desire to discover the new hadn't faded, but his first responsibility was protecting the present, and he couldn't let the future casually stride in. Bill attempted to put a note of command into his voice: "Just tell me what you find, might be something in this for us." Seeing Jack's stony reaction he continued, softer. "Take care. Last man in Ward 11 was involved in a chemical spill and lost 83 per cent of his skin. He looked

like James Dean compared to that man in there. Forty-ninth Century or not, Jack, folk still burn the same."

Jack's watch showed 09.38 when he sat down beside the ward's only patient – less a man than a tattered silhouette, his scorched features casting sharp shadows in the gloom of the ward. As his eyes got used to the dark, he saw Silas' body was blackened and cauterized by the heat. Yellow-white bone jutted through the thin covering of his scalp, and where his ears should have been there was only a gooey mess of cartilage and bone. Silas' face had been protected, and Jack could make out the rough shape of two clasped hands. All the skin surrounding this had gone. Glancing down, Jack could see that the backs of the man's hands were also little more than bone. On his arms, the heat had gone further still, and had scorched away muscle and bone itself, leaving him pitted and eroded. Whatever had done this had burned long and deep. Bill had updated the containment unit since World War II, but it was essentially the same – a tank of salt water, charged with electric currents and an oxygen-rich atmosphere enclosed in glass. Looking at Silas' charts, Jack could see Bill had given him everything – meperidine, diamorphine, codeine, tramadol – plus a few things Jack didn't know Bill had. He took a small ampoule out of his pocket and attached it to the stent in Silas' hand, the painkillers sparkling as they ran down the canula and into his veins. This close, Jack could see the man's heart quicken, and the tension in his muscles slump. He'd just given him 30 minutes without pain.

Temporarily released from his suffering, Silas' eyes flicked open and latched onto Jack, his pupils widening with excitement. Silas lifted a damaged finger, and traced a number on the clear plastic wall. Jack was no longer calm. "That's my age. My REAL age!" he hissed. "Who are you?" Silas' hand had dropped down, and for almost a minute Jack heard nothing in reply but the sounds of breathing. Then a raspy voice coughed out, "Who are you, more to the point. A Time Agent, perhaps?" Jack shook his head. "I used to be. Got a vortex manipulator and everything. But right now I'm not really working if I'm honest." Silas shut his eyes for a very long time. When he opened them again Jack could see tears hitting the raw skin on his cheeks. Holding Jack's eye he begged, "Hold me." When Jack didn't move, he asked again, "Please." Jack couldn't see a reason for keeping the air sterile. The man had lost all the skin on his body, and Bill wasn't about to try a 100 per cent skin graft. He slid the doors of the containment unit apart and took Silas' hand in his. He was surprised at how warm it felt, and the effect it had on Silas. As if sparked into life, Silas moved jerkily in his saline bath, his dry tongue sliding along his teeth, eyes darting around the dark of the ward. His fingers tightened on Jack's, and he craned his neck conspiratorially towards him: "Get me out of here, Time Agent." Jack shook his head. "I have painkillers, but that's all." Silas' eyes bulged greedily and he attempted to move his body towards Jack. "Let me out." Jack shook his head again. "The saline is keeping you alive," he said. Silas sank back into the tank. His brief surge of hope had passed and he was sinking even lower than before. Jack knew that he had a short time before the pain returned and overwhelmed Silas for good. "Tell me who you are." Silas looked at Jack for a second, weighing him up. Something prickled in Jack's mind, and he had the unsettling impression he was being probed. Ignoring the sensation, Jack went on: "I don't think they called me in to help you, Silas. I think they got scared you might turn into something else." Silas spoke again. "So you're my final guard?" Jack nodded. Silas seemed to almost smile. "Here in your long coat, escorting me over..." A terrible hacking laughter came out of his mouth. "I'm dying with a Time Agent by my side!" Silas came to a decision. He lifted his other hand and clasped Jack's in a skeletal grip. As Silas shut his eyes, the skin around Jack's forehead started to tingle, and as it grew warm, Jack started to feel Silas' thoughts entering his head. Keeping his voice calm, Jack spoke out loud, "You're a low-level empath, right? That's how you know how old I am, but you don't know my name." Silas answered inside Jack's head. "So, show me where you're from. I want to know." And with an almost imperceptible squeeze of his hand, Silas transported Jack into his memories.

He was miles above Earth, hanging in the vacuum of space. After the close confines of the ward, the vastness of the heavens stunned Jack, and he wondered why he'd stayed earthbound for so long. All around him stars burned and roared, not still and peaceful but a cauldron of activity. Silas' memory was so real that Jack could feel the solar wind buffeting his body and ruffling his hair. And looking around he could see in awful clarity how Silas had ended up drifting in space. Silas was in a spacesuit, tumbling away from the aftermath of an explosion. Behind him, the heavens were full of the remnants of a Class Five space cruiser, tangles of wires and twisted metal littering the sky. Crueler still, near to Silas, the wreckage of an escape pod was cartwheeling slowing away from him, its padded seats drifting sadly apart. Looking to his left, Jack could see another spacesuit, its visor filled with a dead, bloated face. Silas was letting Jack feel what he'd felt as he floated, and Jack was filled with a dread he hadn't felt in a very long time: an expectation of finality – of death. It dominated his mind and made his thoughts pulse with anger and injustice. As the spacesuit turned in the vastness of space, Jack could see the blue and green of Earth far below. Twinkling beneath them, a satellite locked into its final descent began to brush the atmosphere, before its solar panels ▸

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glowed orange and broke off, fluttering down into oblivion. Freed from any impeding shape, the lump of metal plunged deeper, turning into something so bright Jack had to shut his eyes. He thought for a second how wonderful it was to see the heavens at work – the tiny moments of beauty as a hundred pieces of space debris sent shooting stars over an unsuspecting world. When the gentle tug of gravity began to take Silas, Jack was surprised by the calmness of the moment. The dread was evaporating inside Silas' mind. The final decision had been made, and his life would soon be over. All Silas expected was a final switching-off of experience. There would be no continuation of doubt and worry. His body had become no different from the other debris around him: he had become an inevitability. Jack could feel Silas' heartbeat slow. This was what it really meant to be carefree. Free of caring for anything any more, even himself. Silas began to feel the resistance to his fall. Faster and faster he fell, into lighter and lighter shades of blue. Silas felt like a man who had defeated death. He felt like he had achieved the impossible.

"It was a miracle, I guess." Jack opened his eyes. Silas was smiling a lipless smile as he went on. "So instead of dying with the stars behind me, I get to pass away in a salt water tank in a tin hut." Jack had known men like Silas in World War II: pilots so used to losing those around them that they began to take pride in their fate, glorying in the manner of their own eventual deaths. Silas talked on, his voice dry, but feeling no pain. "I'm the navigation officer of the spaceship Taurus X. We were a convoy mission, two thousand of us in three ships, returning from the New Earth colonies. Our colony had been deemed too expensive, and we were being brought home. There was a fire on the oxygen decks, my cabin was directly above it. My wife was there. My boys..." Jack could see the tears running down Silas' cheeks, but he didn't pause, eager to share his story. "Our escape pod was a new design – equipped with an emergency time-jump." Jack knew what Silas was talking about. Instead of escaping a wrecked ship, the pod leaped a week into the future, arriving at a point in time when the danger had all gone, and with rescue ships primed to await your arrival.

"Something went wrong. We got caught in the blast as we made the jump. The pod disintegrated and I was left floating in space – falling down and down. Everything I know has gone, Jack. You can make this better. In 200 years they'll be able to cure this, you know they will. Take me there, Jack. I know you can."

Jack knew that Silas was right. In the 23rd Century, the best surgeons could encase him in metal and call him a success story. A few hundred years later and the Bill Wainwrights of the day would be able to graft geo-skin to his body, encasing him in soft green carapace. Eventually they'd be able to give him everything back – unblemished, taut and toughened. Superskin: a process so expensive they made patients serve four years on the front lines in order to pay it back. "All we can do is freeze you, Silas." But they both knew where that would lead. Jack thought sadly about the fate of the 21st Century dreamers – the men and women who were cryo-frozen, only to find that when they awoke they were condemned to life in their giant freezers, wheeled around and transmitting their thoughts as tinny little electronic voices, their bodies never fully able to defrost entirely.

And now Jack felt very tired. Silas' story had been beautiful. And if anyone deserved saving, it was a man who had lost everything. Silas was still talking; clinging to the new hope he had found in Jack. "I have immunizations, you know. Compounds in my blood. You could use them to destroy Malaria, to destroy..." But Jack cut him off. "I can't let that happen Silas." Jack let go of his hand and stood up. The room was silent. Jack gazed at the pictures of surviving servicemen hanging on the walls. These were soldiers whose lives had been saved in this hospital: men who had defended their country, and in return had been left disfigured. They had left cheery signed messages to Bill and his team. "My darts have improved. Your glass eye works a treat! Love 'Eye-too-high Tom.'" Jack controlled the emotion in his voice. "You make me wonder, Silas. Whether everyone deserves saving."

SILAS WAS STANDING OUTSIDE THE TANK, UNSTEADILY WALKING ON BLOODIED FEET. HE WAS HEADING FOR THE DOOR, THE PAINKILLERS MAKING HIM FEEL INVINCIBLE.

his silica-cell suit scant protection against the burn of the thickening atmosphere. In his saline tank, Silas was speaking. Jack kept his eyes shut and listened to the story. Images came to his mind like little explosions. As weak as he was, Silas still had abilities to touch and create.

"I fell from the stars, through the higher reaches of your world. At 100 miles, my suit began to crack, and at 80 miles, my boots burnt up. I used the pads on the knees against the burn, and when they went I used my feet." Jack could see him, face contorted behind the mask, as 1600 degrees centigrade tore against him.

"But the death I expected never came. By the time my suit started to rip away, I was in the upper atmosphere. Under my suit I was wearing neo-thermal fabric. It burnt, but only at the very last. One more minute of heat and I'd be dead. My oxygen lasted until I was able to breathe." And Jack could see it all. The rushing and the wonder, as Silas passed through the dark layers of the stratosphere,

In the silence that followed, Jack thought about when it was that he had come to play God with people's lives. He'd never meant to become the arbiter of whether people deserved to live. But looking around the ward he realized it wasn't only him that carried the burden. Jack was thankful for Silas. For once, here was a man who was going to make it easy for him. He brought Silas into his confidence. "You know, last time I was here, a lot of people were unhappy with me," he said. "I brought in two injured bombers. German

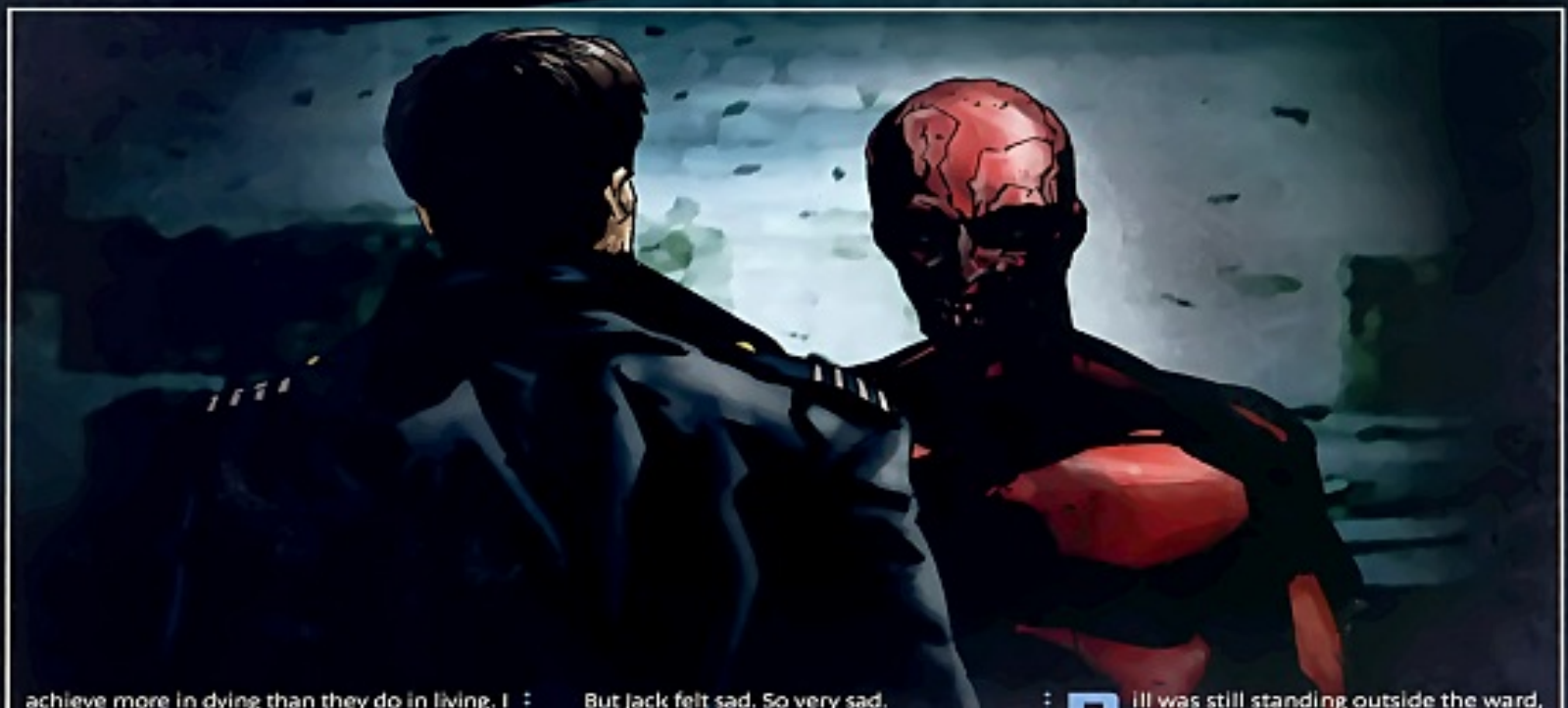
airmen. The British surgeons knew – I didn't hide it and we never talked about it. Afterwards, Bill told me he'd carried out the most experimental surgery of his career. Something he'd never try on a British serviceman. It saved their lives. They didn't go back to fight, and they have families now. I still get postcards sometimes. But you, Silas, you weren't a soldier, and you weren't a navigation officer. You were a dreamer, and sometimes you have to let those dreams die." Silas was attempting to sit upright now.

"You showed me almost everything, Silas. And you were good, oh yeah, you are very good at hiding. But I've been here before, and I know that under that calm, you were angry when you fell. You'd been betrayed. You weren't even surprised to be floating in space. Your mind didn't even flicker when you saw your co-pilot dead. But you weren't expecting to be in the 21st Century. And the reason is that you planned it all, didn't you? Every single last detail. So show me again." This time it was Jack grabbing hold of Silas' hand. "I want to see the truth." All too willingly, Silas took Jack back – the images in his mind blurring and settling. Now Jack could see the Taurus X floating above Earth in all its glory, its two sister ships alongside. Silas was far away, sitting in a separate ship, cloaked from the Taurus. Silas drew Jack closer in. He could see Silas sitting with controls in his hands, pressing a sequence of buttons, and he could see the Taurus exploding: gouts of flame obscuring everything that Silas could see, the reflections bright against Silas' black visor. The time-jump drive kicked in, taking Silas and all the debris with it. Here was the moment of disaster! The settings were wrong. Silas had been betrayed. Such fear, such anger. Silas was free and falling.

Jack's grip was growing tighter, and he could feel the last remaining flesh giving beneath his fingers. "SHOW ME MORE!" he growled at Silas, and the dying man obliged. In snapshots, he saw Silas placing the explosives on the outside of the hull; he saw Silas on a colony planet, surrounded by blue mountains and white chalk roads that shone under the light of several stars; he saw him arguing in a rest room, shouting his heart out: "The colonies must stay separate!" He saw the slogans scrawled across the newsgroups: "There shall be no return to Earth!" He saw Silas drinking alone in his room, fingers racing across a keyboard – long pain-filled rants of the Free Colony Movement. And before all this, Jack saw Silas standing inside a vast geo-dome, ecstatic in his home, the only place he'd felt safe, a land that was his with the stars all around him. And Jack felt Silas' rage, his impotence. His world was being taken from him. "They called us back like we were cattle returning from the fields." While Jack saw nothing but low-ceilinged dorms and rationed water, Silas' thoughts floated through the cramped base, singing and happy, imagining freedom.

But Silas' truths were hard and angry. Bitterness loomed over them, and death had been the result. "You were conned," said Jack. "They'd programmed the time drive to dump you here – the backwaters of the 21st Century. Somewhere no one would know what you'd done and no one would know your name. If you died in the 49th Century it would have started a war. But this was a perfect burial ground for just another piece of space trash. You'd disappear from time. An unmarked corpse. No record of what happened. I guess they knew you'd be defenceless – that you'd fall through the atmosphere unguarded. It must have hurt. Oh, it must have stung. They probably calculated exactly how far to let you fall. Couldn't risk you floating off into space – they wanted your body burnt. All you'd risked and they didn't even try to get you home."

Silas looked at Jack with defiance in his eyes. "I did what was right," he said. But Jack was angry himself now and barely listening. "You killed your own people! People you'd grown up with! You blew them up so you could make a point?" Silas had heard these arguments playing over and over in his head and wasn't going to be persuaded now. He had no regrets. "Sometimes, Jack, people ▸



achieve more in dying than they do in living. I had to make a stand."

"Let me tell you now, Silas, that you did not succeed. What you did was ignored; never studied. It's not in a single history book. The colonies returned, Earth remained united, and you were no hero. Not even a villain." Silas smiled – his blackened teeth murderous in the gloom. "Your anger is very touching..." He rested his bony finger on Jack's hand and suddenly he was back on the Boeshane Peninsula, running and running and running. His mother so angry, his father gone. Then it all went black. Momentarily blinded. Jack opened his eyes, and saw that Silas had achieved the impossible.

Silas was standing outside the tank, unsteadily walking on bloodied feet. He was heading for the door, the painkillers making him feel invincible. He saw Jack had regained consciousness and spoke down at him, all traces of humility gone. "I'm like the men on the wall: a hero, a soldier. My cause was true. More true than theirs. And you saved all of them, even the ones that bombed you while you slept. So you can save me, Time Agent. I've seen inside your mind!" Silas took a lurching step towards the door. "You have it in you, so call your surgeon! I'll tell them who I am. They can keep me alive." Silas took another few steps, bloody footprints marking his sorry progress. Jack watched quietly, there was no way Silas could reach the door in time. "I'll tell them so much, Jack! I'll show them ways to heal they've never dreamed of! I'll save so many lives!"

But Jack felt sad. So very sad.

"I think it would destroy Bill," Jack replied, "to find out that centuries from now, with all that will have been achieved, people are still planting bombs, and innocent people are still dying." He strode to where Silas was unsteadily walking, and looked him in the eye. "I honestly don't know if he'd be able to go on. All the people working in this hospital Silas – they're hoping for a better future. One without men like you. Because if it's all about new bombs and new ways to patch people up, then it's all a bit pointless, isn't it?"

Silas was still yards from the door, and was staring at his feet in horror. "Jack, I'm starting to feel them!" he cried. Jack looked at his watch: it was now 10.02. The dose he'd given Silas didn't have long. "Give me more! I can live like this. I don't need to die". In the face of Jack's silence, he started to rant, his mouth slowing as sensation returned and movements became ever more painful. "I'm a hero, Jack! Everything changes because of me. I know it happens! I can feel it!" But Jack was still impassive.

When the pain came, Silas' eyes showed it first. The painkillers drained from his body as quickly as they'd entered it, and the feeling returned to every nerve ending with brutal impact. Silas was quivering with shock, his body unable to take what he was feeling. With his last breath, Silas whispered, "I'm proud of what I did," and then his knees buckled and he collapsed on the floor. Jack wasn't sure at what point Silas died.

Bill was still standing outside the ward, and was surprised to be caught up in a massive embrace from Jack. "It's been really good to see you again, Bill. I don't think I ever thanked you all those years ago." Jack reached into his jacket pocket and handed Bill five ampoules of his shimmering serum. Bill nodded gratefully and pocketed it. "Never did manage to replicate that stuff, no matter how much I tried. Got a few things out of it, though." Jack couldn't help but smile at the old man's determination.

"And that man in there – Silas – who was he?" Jack paused for a while before answering. "He was no one." Bill hurried after Jack, who was all too keen to get away. "Should we put him with the servicemen?" Jack thought for a second, "Better not – him being from the future. Put the remains in the incinerator. Forget he was ever here." Bill was looking at Jack in surprise. He hadn't expected him to be so affected by what he'd seen in there. "You OK, Captain?" Jack nodded. "You did the right thing calling me, Bill. Now back home with you, and that's an order." Bill gave a mock-salute as Jack stepped into the SUV. "Thank you Captain." Jack smiled back, "Take care, Bill."

As the car pulled away from the ramshackle Victorian building, Jack wondered what his last story would be, and who he would be telling it to. Would he end up like the man that dreamed of stars, full of conviction to the very end? Or did the cosmos have other fates in store for him?

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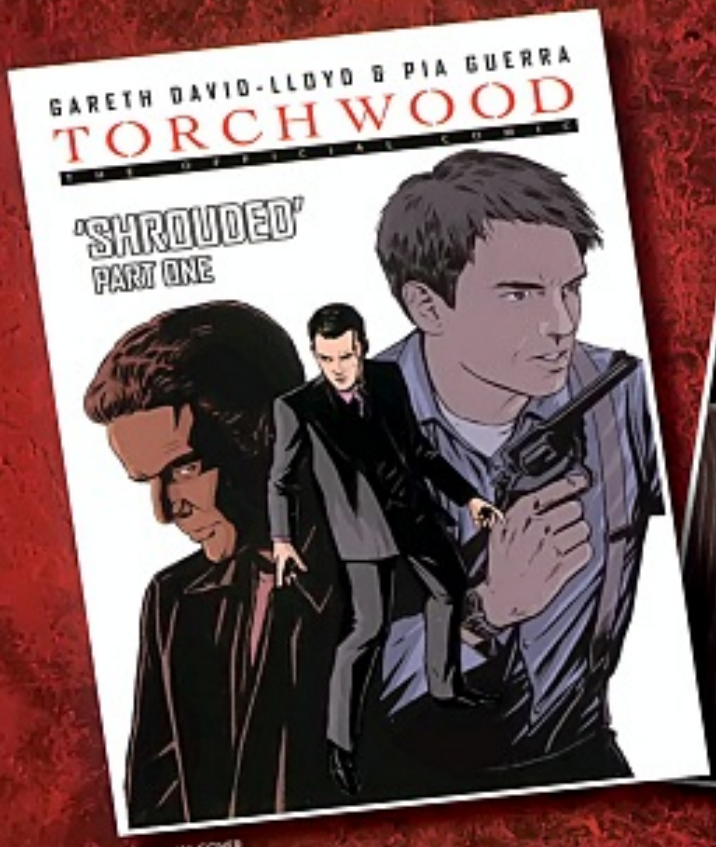

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